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## AN EARLY AMERICAN TRANSLATION OF THE ADESTE FIDELES.

BY RIGHT REV. MGR. H. T. HENRY, LITT. D.

Some years ago W. H. Grattan Flood, K.S.G., the noted Irish hymnologist and musical antiquary, contributed to a prominent Catholic magazine published in Philadelphia <sup>1</sup> an article on the *Adeste Fideles*, in which he claimed an Irish authorship for the translation beginning with the words: "With hearts truly grateful":

English words were adapted to the hymn about the year 1825, and another version was given by Father William Young, of Dublin, in 1840, printed with the music in the *Catholic Choralist* (Dublin), in 1842. As Father Young was regarded as a saint equally with his brother, Father Charles Young (whose life has been charmingly written by Lady Georgiana Fullerton), many readers may be glad to see this specimen by his translation, given with the music on page 712.

And on the indicated "page 712" of the magazine, under

<sup>1</sup> Flood, *Notes on the Origin of the "Adeste Fideles"* in *The Dolphin*, December, 1905.

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the heading, "Adeste Fideles. [1842]. Sung each day from Christmas till the Octave of the Epiphany at Mass, Vespers and Benediction", Dr. Flood prints a transcript of the melody with the words of the first verse placed under the notes :

With hearts truly grateful, come, all ye faithful,  
To Jesus, to Jesus in Bethlehem.  
See Christ, your Saviour, heav'n's greatest favor,  
Let's hasten to adore Him,  
Let's hasten to adore Him,  
Let's hasten to adore Him, our great Lord.

The parenthetical date of 1842 is doubtless an insertion made by Dr. Flood. The music given is the traditional melody of the hymn. The first verse of the English translation belongs to that which is found most commonly in our American Catholic hymnals, with the exception that the American form of the hymn closes the verse with "our God and King" instead of "our great Lord".

In my first quotation from Dr. Flood's article, the authorship of this translation is given without hesitation to Father William Young, of Dublin, and the date assigned to the translation is the year 1840. From what I shall have to say of this attribution of authorship and assignment of date, one may fairly conjecture that the first printed appearance of the translation in Ireland was in the *Catholic Choralist* issued by Father Young in 1842.

Dr. Flood's assignment of date as of the year 1840 can be immediately rejected, for I have found the translation in several Catholic hymnals published before the year 1840 in the United States. The earliest of these is *Hymns for the Use of the Catholic Church in the United States of America. A New Edition, with Additions and Improvements. Baltimore: Printed by John West Butler. 1807.* In this little volume of 112 pages the four Latin stanzas are followed by the five stanzas of the English rendering (pages 33-35) :

With hearts truly grateful,  
Come, all ye faithful,  
To Jesus, to Jesus in Bethlehem.  
See Christ your Saviour,  
Heav'ns (*sic*) greatest favour.  
Let's hasten to adore him,  
Let's hasten to adore him,  
Let's hasten to adore him, our God and King.<sup>2</sup>

Unless we ascribe to Father William Young a youthful precocity like that of Alexander Pope or Alfred Tennyson, we may with equal confidence reject the claim for his authorship of the translation; for in an article contributed by Dr. Flood to *The Month* for January, 1916,<sup>3</sup> we find that Father Young was born in 1795 and that he "wrote numerous hymns and translations, to be found in his *Catholic Choralist* (1842). Of these a few are still sung in Catholic Churches . . ." (page 16). According to this, the lad would be only twelve years of age when the Baltimore hymnal of 1807 appeared.

Now, in thus rejecting the specific claims set forth by Dr. Flood, it is with not a little hesitation that, in the title to the present paper, I have "staked a claim" for an American authorship of the translation. My reasons, however, are these:

(1) Dr. Flood, who has been for many years searching not alone the highways, but as well the byways, of Irish musical history, and who has published several learned volumes and many articles in connection with his researches, seems to have been unaware of any rendering of the *Adeste Fideles* into English verse before the year 1825. "English words were adapted to the hymn about the year 1825," he

<sup>2</sup> Some of our hymnals do not print all the five stanzas. It is unnecessary to give them here, however, as they may be easily found in *The American Catholic Hymnal* edited by the Marist Brothers and published by P. J. Kenedy & Sons in New York in 1913.

<sup>3</sup> Flood, *Ireland's Contribution to English Hymnody*, pp. 36-41.

remarks in his article contributed to *The Dolphin*. He wrote this in 1905, and of course he would modify the statement very considerably to-day. But it is clear that, having made many "Notes" on the origin of the hymn and of its melody, he was, in 1905, unaware of any version of the hymn into English before the year 1825, so far as his study of Catholic hymnals or prayer-books published in Ireland could inform him. As our translation nevertheless appeared in 1807—eighteen years earlier than the date set by Dr. Flood—we may fairly conclude that it is most probably not of Irish origin.

This conclusion is strengthened by other considerations. The Latin text of the hymn was known in Ireland about the same time as in England or in Scotland. The Latin words cannot be traced back further than about the middle of the eighteenth century. They are found in a manuscript in Stonyhurst College, England, authentically dated 1751; in another preserved in Euing Library, Glasgow, authentically dated 1750; and in still another, until recently preserved in Clongowes Wood College, Ireland, apparently undated, but doubtless written about the same time as the others. In England alone, apparently, was the hymn translated into the vernacular at an early date. If it was sung at all in Ireland, probably it was sung only in Latin. One might safely infer this from the fact that Bishop David published his edition of the *True Piety, or, the Day Well Spent* at Baltimore in 1809—two years after the Catholic hymnal had been issued in the same city. The *True Piety*, however, gives the Easter hymn (*O Filii*), but not the Christmas hymn (*Adeste*), although both are equally unliturgical. It would seem that Bishop David desired to stick pretty closely to his original, namely, the edition of the *True Piety* which had been published at Cork in 1797, and which, says Finotti (*Bibliographia Catholica Americana*, p. 100), "only forms the groundwork of the much enlarged American edition".



Despite this enlargement, Bishop David did not include the *Adeste Fideles*.

In an edition of the Augustinian Father Gahan's *Manual of Catholic Piety*, which was published in Dublin in 1839, only the Latin text of the *Adeste Fideles* is given.

Thus the *True Piety* (Cork, 1797) and the *Manual of Catholic Piety* (Dublin, 1839) seem to throw some light on Dr. Flood's view that no early translation of the hymn had appeared in Ireland, and also explain, perhaps, his attribution of our translation to Father William Young as author.

(2) Excluding Ireland as a probable source of our translation, we next turn to England. Here we are confronted with most abundant information in Dr. Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*. Despite his wide study of English hymnals, Dr. Julian can find no earlier source of our translation than a Catholic hymnal published in Washington in 1830, and mistakenly places it amongst those "not in common use". It seems therefore reasonable to exclude England as a possible source of our version. I can conjecture no reason for supposing that Scotland or Wales could offer more promising results, and accordingly, by this process of exclusion, I am forced to consider that our version is of American origin.

(3) There are several weighty reasons for supposing that our translation first appeared in print in the Baltimore hymn-book of 1807. So familiar are we with the "most Christmassy" of hymns, both in its Latin text and in one or other of its English versions, that we find it difficult to realize either that the Latin text is not very old or that the widespread use of the hymn is comparatively recent. Our modern hymnals commonly give the *Adeste Fideles* as a popular but unliturgical Christmas hymn, and similarly furnish us with the *O Filii* (either in Latin or in English translation, and not infrequently in both Latin and English) as a popular but unliturgical hymn for Easter. Our earliest

American choir-books and hymnals, on the other hand, apparently do not know the *Adeste Fideles* at all, but are scrupulously careful to furnish the singers with the *O Filii* in its long English translation of twelve stanzas. It may not seem in any way startling to us to find the well-known "With hearts truly grateful" dating back to the year 1807. We might fancy it as common to the various *Primers*, *Evening Offices of Our Lady*, or *Divine Offices*, or combined hymn-and-prayer books so much used by our Catholic forbears in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A student of hymnology like Dr. Flood, however, found its appearance in a hymnal issued as late as the year 1842 sufficiently striking to make him ascribe it to the compiler of the hymnal, the Rev. William Young, of Dublin. It is going a long way back in American Catholic hymnody when we find our version in the hymnal of 1807. It is not given in Benjamin Carr's Catholic choir-book, published in Baltimore only two years earlier (1805), which nevertheless contains what is apparently a Protestant version ("Hither, ye faithful, come with songs of triumph"). Carr's very noteworthy volume is undated, but a copy of it preserved in the library of the Pennsylvania Historical Society bears written testimony that it was published in 1805.<sup>4</sup> On the

<sup>4</sup> This important work by Benjamin Carr has for title-page: "A New Edition, with an Appendix of / Masses. Vespers, Litanies, / Hymns and Psalms, Anthems and Motetts. / Composed, selected and arranged for the use of the / Catholic Churches in the United States of America / Respectfully Dedicated by permission to the / Right Revd. John Carrol (*sic*), D. D., Bishop of Baltimore. / Sold by J. Carr, Baltimore; C. Blake, Philadelphia; J. Hewitt, New York, and F. Mallet, Boston." I have transcribed the title from the copy in the library of the American Catholic Historical Society. No indication of date is anywhere given in this volume. The dedication to the "Right. Revd." John Carroll, "Bishop" of Baltimore, indicates clearly that the work appeared before the year 1808, when Carroll became Archbishop. The written testimony given by the copy in the library of the Pennsylvania Historical Society is doubtless correct.

other hand, the *Adeste Fideles* is not given, either in Latin or in English, in John Aitken's "Compilation" for Catholic Choirs published in Philadelphia in 1787, with new editions in 1791 and 1814, although the corresponding "Easter Hymn" (a translation of the "O Filii et Filiae", apparently taken from the *Evening Office of Our Lady* published in London in 1748) is given in all three editions. It is very probable that the compiler of the Baltimore Catholic hymnal of 1807 was ignorant of Carr's volume, issued only two years earlier in the same city. Carr used a translation which is most likely of Protestant authorship, as a reference to it is found in Hobart's *Festivals and Fasts* (1804) to the effect that it had been frequently sung in Episcopalian services on Christmas Day. The compiler of the Catholic hymnal of 1807 appears to have desired to break away from this Episcopalian tradition, and to provide a Catholic version of the Catholic hymn to be sung to the traditional melody.

(4) The Baltimore version of 1807 does not seem to be popular in the British Isles. Julian places it under the heading of "not in common use". I am not familiar with Catholic hymnals published in Ireland, but it is perhaps significant of its unpopularity there that, despite its appearance in Father Young's volume of 1842, it is not given either in Father Gaynor's edition of *St. Patrick's Hymn Book* or in *The Armagh Hymnal*, both of which were published in Dublin in 1906 and 1915 respectively. In America, on the other hand, this version, unkempt though it be from a poetical standpoint, has been most widely used. It is not freakish to found an argument on this double fact; for there seems to be an unconscious sentiment of natural affection for national hymnody. The French have clung with wonderful persistency to their Easter hymn, *O Filii*, although it is unliturgical and although the French appear to have been fully accustomed to sing the truly liturgical hymns in the

original Latin text. Similarly, they cling to a French-Latin cento of the *Adeste Fideles* which is not the one used in English-speaking countries. Now the *O Filii* is certainly of French authorship. The Form of the *Adeste* sung in France is almost certainly of French authorship, while the form sung in English-speaking countries is almost certainly of English origin. If one may argue in a similar fashion concerning a translation of the *Adeste*, one would fairly assume that the Baltimore translation of 1807 is of American origin, for its use has been confined almost exclusively to America. I could illustrate this assertion by a surprisingly long list of volumes published for Catholic use in America—a list that would almost give a complete narrative of our prolific editing of hymnals. This story must at some time form a chapter in the history of American Catholicity. While it is possible for us to do it, we should gather up the fragments of the story, lest they be lost. I have tried to preserve here one fragment of America's contribution to English Hymnody.